

KILL THE BOSS

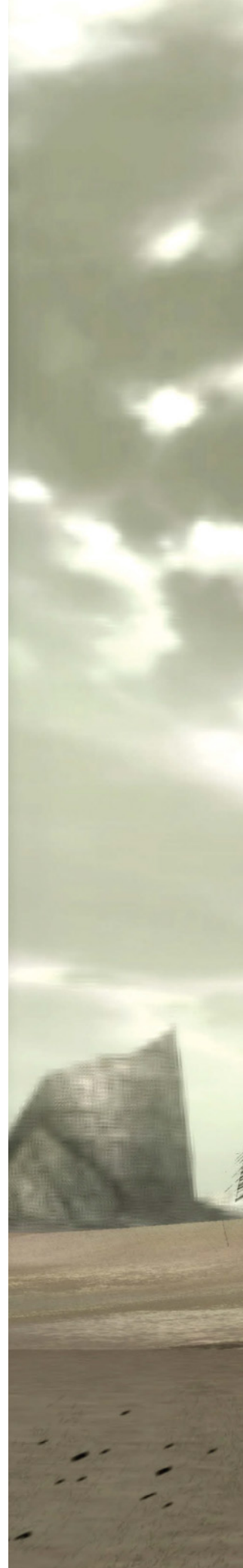
**The Greatest Battles
In Gaming History**



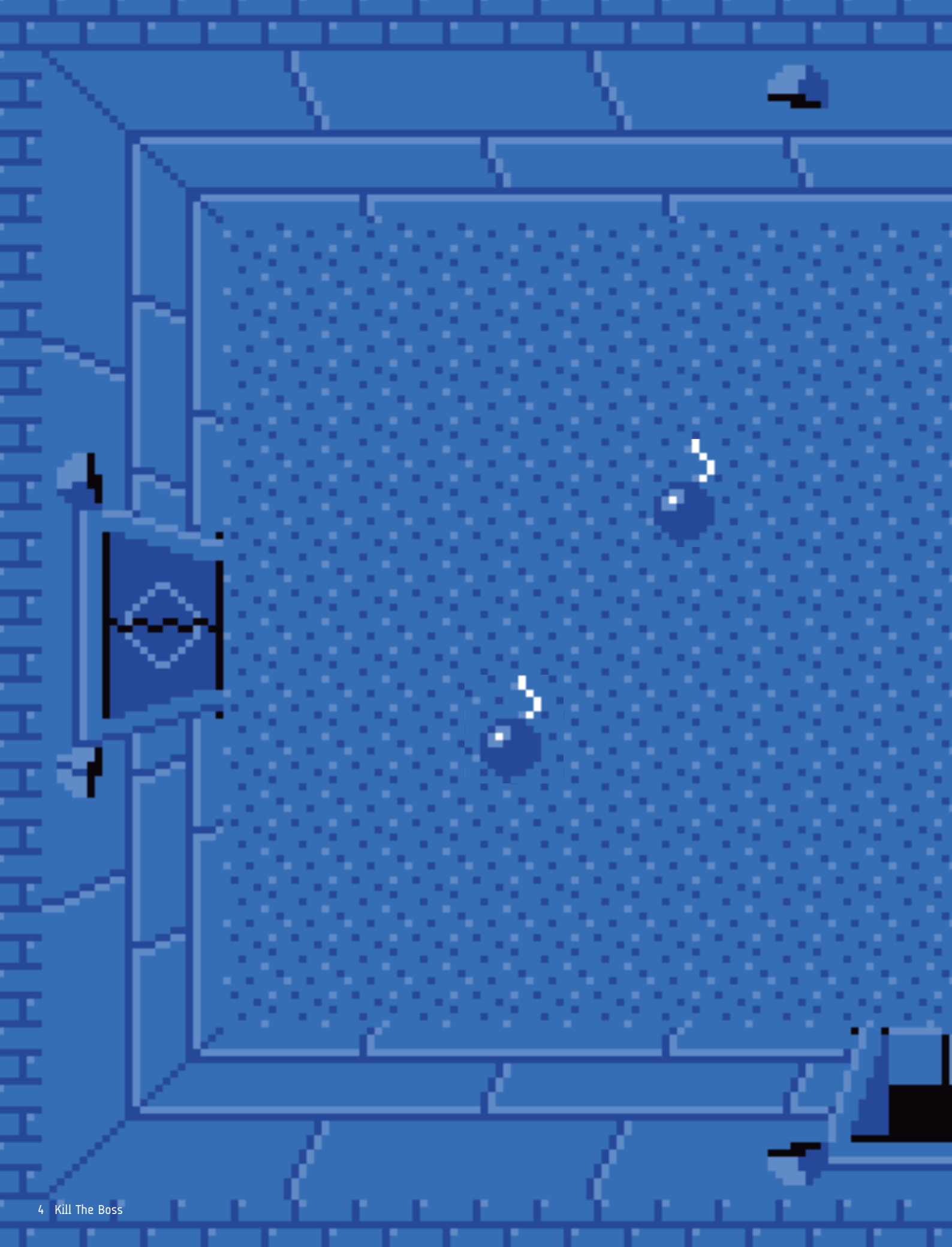
KILL THE BOSS

The Greatest Battles In Gaming History

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THE LEGEND OF ZELDA NES [Nintendo] 1986

■ One of the greatest things about playing Nintendo games, and *Zelda* in particular, is the 'what if?' syndrome. That feeling of wondering what will happen if you do something unusual, and realising that Nintendo anticipated your experiment, providing a cool reaction. Several examples are present throughout the first *Zelda* – setting fire to a bush, for example – but the best is probably in the second boss, Dodongo. Though the giant lizard can be killed by throwing bombs at his belly, it's actually more effective and fun to drop a bomb in his path, causing him to eat and swallow the explosive, blowing his guts up from the inside out.



R-TYPE Arcade [Irem] 1987

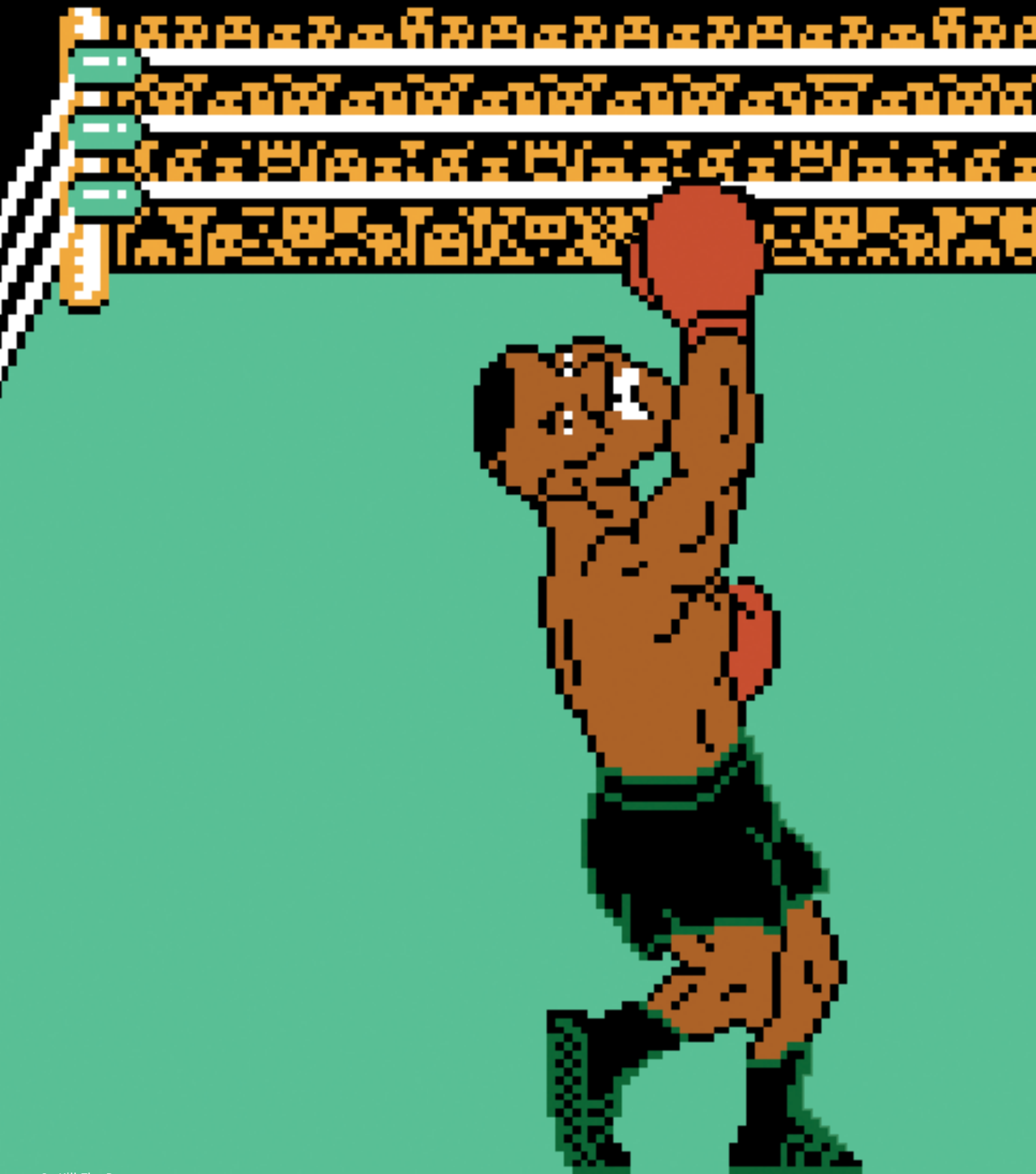
BEST BOSS

THERE'S A REASON that boss battles are some of the most fondly remembered parts of most classic videogames. They're usually very big. Huge screen-filling monstrosities in fact. They're so great that they tower over whatever you happen to be controlling and dominate that part of the game, bringing progress to a halt like no other enemy could and making you work harder than ever if you want to reach the next level. And few videogame boss battles fit this definition better than *R-Type*'s mighty Dobkeratops. Blocking your way at the end of Stage 1, this gruesome beast is so big that he doesn't just tower upward, he also has to squeeze bits of himself horizontally as he crams himself within the confines of the arcade monitor.





POINT





MIKE TYSON'S PUNCH-OUT!! NES [Nintendo] 1987

■ For a while, we've taken the term 'best boss' to mean those we remember fondly, those that did something different, or just those so bizarre that we can't help plastering them across these pages. But what if we were to pick guardians that were unrivalled in their ability to stop you from seeing the credits? Well, Mike Tyson would have to be up there. *Punch-Out!!* is never exactly easy, but when you reach the 20-foot Tyson at its end, you're in for a whole world of hurt. He'll KO you in a single hit and block your blows all day, meaning you'll be going back and spitting out pixelated teeth time and time again before you come close to making the big man hit the mat. You never will, by the way.

BEST BOSS





SCORE 31630

TIME 1:00

RINGS 50



SONIC THE HEDGEHOG Mega Drive [Sega] 1991

IN THE history of videogames, has any other boss been as persistent as Dr Robotnik? Not just content to pop up as the major villain at the end of the game, Sonic the Hedgehog's arch nemesis waits at the end of every single world, each time with a slightly better contraption designed to stop Sonic in his tracks. Like the videogame equivalent of Wile E Coyote, he never seems to give in even after so many failures and only bounces back with an even sillier invention than before. Even Bowser has been known to take a rest, leaving his kids to handle some smaller levels, but Robotnik just keeps on going.

BEST BOSS







STREET FIGHTER II MULTI [Capcom] 1992

■ Fighting game bosses are, almost without exception, disgustingly cheap. And this guy right here? It's all his fault. Sharp-dressed Shadaloo boss M. Bison – his look so hot that even Cheryl Cole has copied it – gets his hands dirty after you defeat his minions, in an imposing and crazy-hard final battle. The combination of power and mobility makes his Psycho Power tough to overcome, with Bison launching into vicious combos, and scoring stuns even on lower difficulties. Bison only grew stronger, too – his final *Alpha 3* form proved so tough that you could pit two characters against him in Dramatic Battle mode and still come off worse. And no, we don't know what the 'M' stands for either...

BEST BOSS



CONTRA III: THE ALIEN WARS SNES [KONAMI] 1992

RELEASED IN PAL territories as *Super Probotector: Alien Rebels*, *Contra III* was the first instance that the muscular franchise was developed exclusively for home console. And it didn't disappoint, bringing with it a knowing absurdity and Eighties machismo wrapped in a ceaseless torrent of bulletfire and explosions. In an obvious homage to James Cameron's original *Terminator*, *Contra III*'s iconic Big Faust boss battle delights in keeping players on their toes. It begins with two robotic creatures vigorously jumping around the room until you rip them in half, but the battle only really begins when the boss proper arrives. Tearing its steel claws through the scenery and ripping the walls apart, this gargantuan machine is a true testament to *Contra*'s creative ingenuity, not only presenting colossal spectacle within the confines of a 16-bit stage but backing up its presentation with an unrelenting challenge.

6000

71

SUB-ZERO



5

GORO

BEST BOSS

MORTAL KOMBAT ARCADE [Midway] 1992

■ With its digitized characters and emphasis on all things gory, poor Goro couldn't have felt much more out of place as *Mortal Kombat*'s penultimate credit thief. A wonky-looking stop-motion creature with four arms, Goro is supposedly a 2,000-year old half-dragon, though he's probably better remembered as the wall that stood between you and the game's last boss, Shang Tsung. And what a wall he was. With an annoying grapple move that sees him grab you with two arms while using his spares to wail on you like a skin-covered bongo, an overpowered fireball and basic strikes capable of smashing entire health bars, we still can't beat him consistently. Cheap...



BEST BOSS

SUPER MARIO BROS. 2 NES/SNES [Nintendo] 1988/1993

■ Whether you consider it a 'proper' Mario game or not, *Super Mario Bros. 2* was a damn good Nintendo platformer, built around the central mechanic of lifting and throwing objects and enemies. Some might argue that it's this mechanic that made the first boss battle, with Birdo, so memorable. When Birdo fires an egg at Mario, you can jump on top of it, pluck it from the air and throw it back at the boss. It's a really imaginative touch, but it isn't the reason that this classic battle has stuck in our minds for so long. Rather, we have to ask: what kind of sick character designer would create a boss capable of firing eggs from its own face? Doesn't that make Birdo's reproductive organs too visible?





SUPER STAR WARS: THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK SNES [JVC] 1993

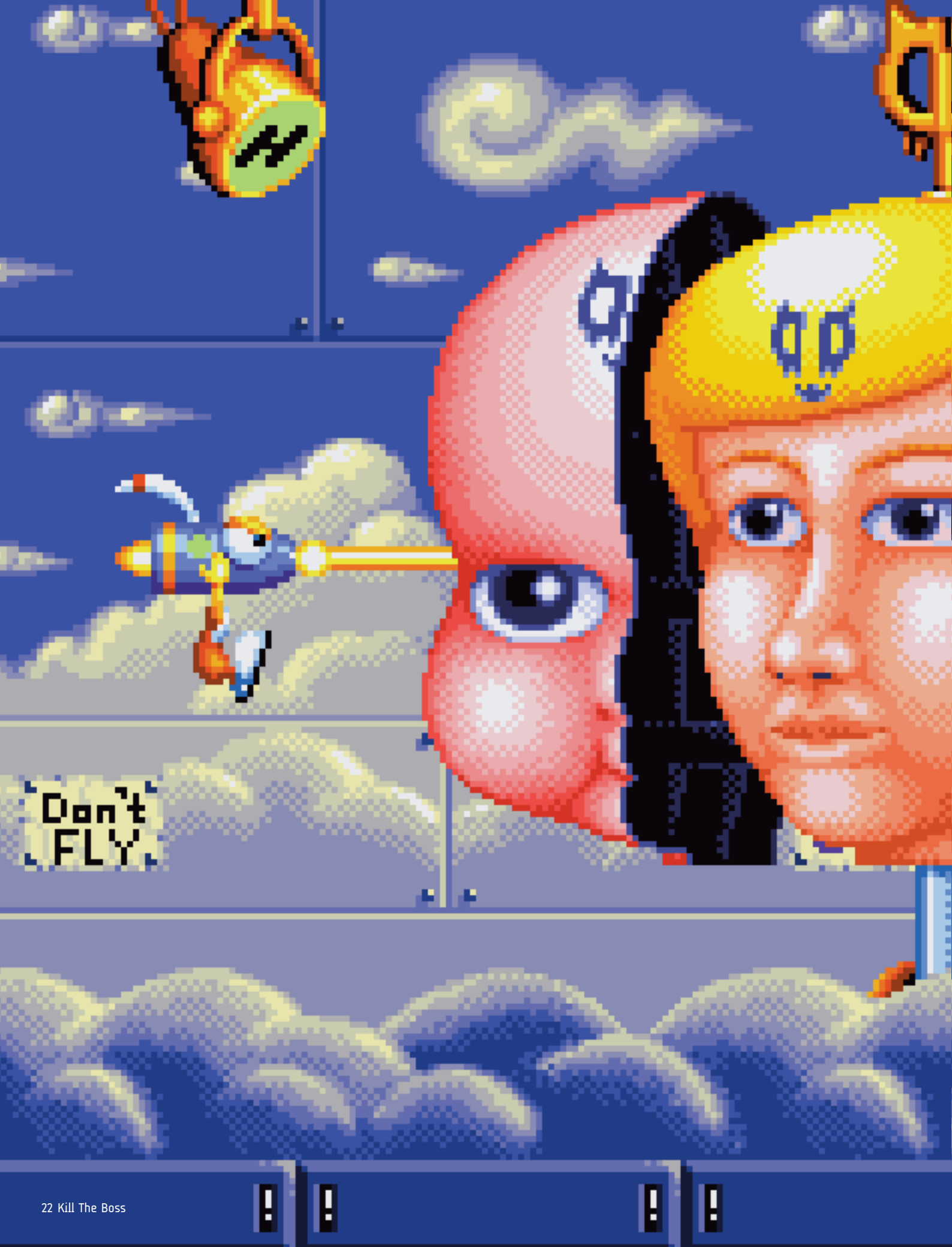
■ IF A PLAYER can survive *The Empire Strikes Back*'s absurd balancing issues – including a near-impossible, screen-filling Dagobah boss monster that never even existed in George Lucas' enthusiastically CGI'd rereleases – the end of the game plays host to a neat 2D interpretation of everyone's favourite Jeremy Kyle revelation.

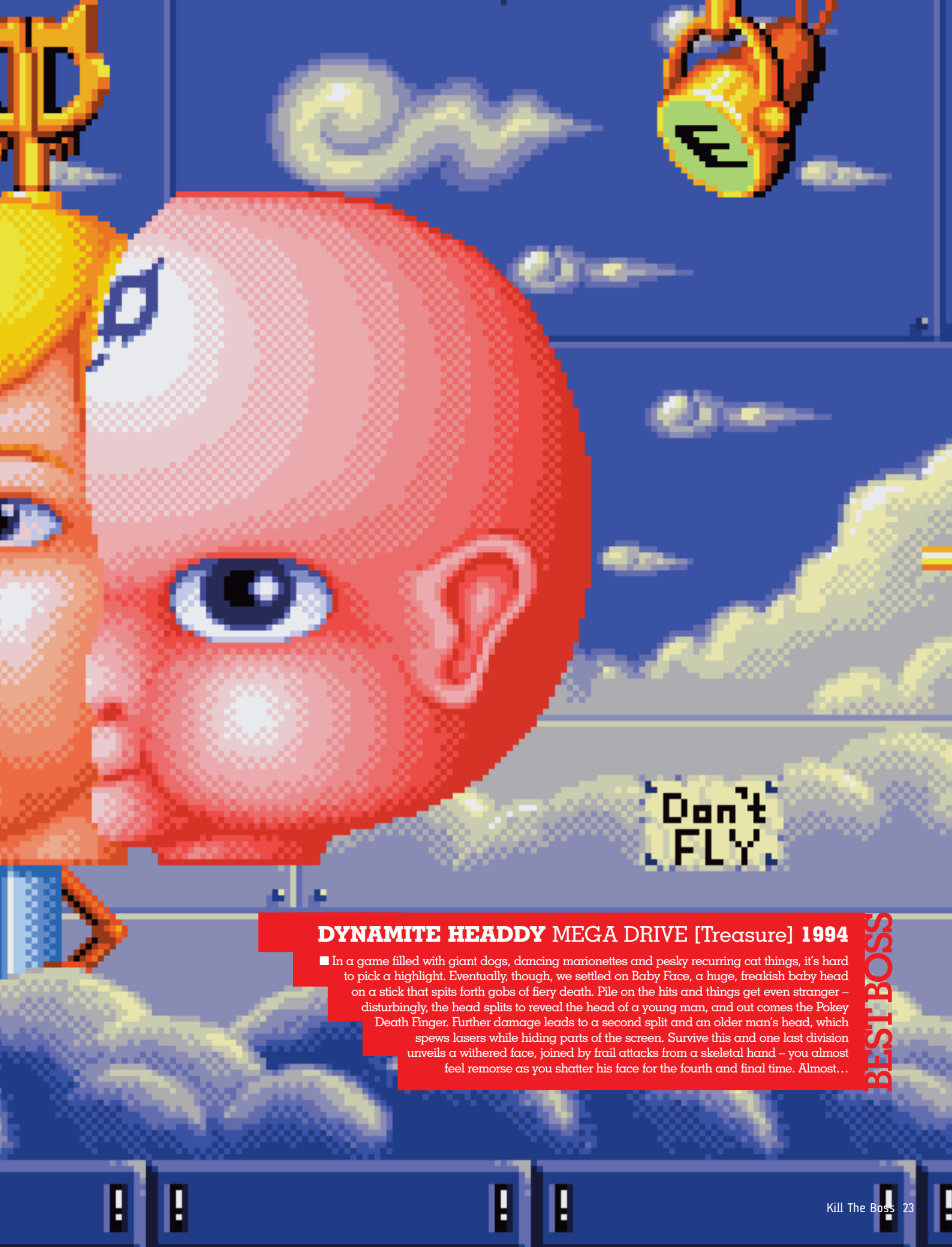
Before the DNA test result comes in, however, Luke Skywalker has to take part in an energetic lightsaber duel – complete with pyrotechnically clashing blades – and avoid a shower of environmental debris Darth Vader pulls from the walls and hurls in his direction. Judicious use of Force powers and a whole heap of luck is required to reach the game's wrist-severing conclusion.

ORE
0700

SABER
FORCE







DYNAMITE HEADDY MEGA DRIVE [Treasure] 1994

■ In a game filled with giant dogs, dancing marionettes and pesky recurring cat things, it's hard to pick a highlight. Eventually, though, we settled on Baby Face, a huge, freakish baby head on a stick that spits forth gobs of fiery death. Pile on the hits and things get even stranger – disturbingly, the head splits to reveal the head of a young man, and out comes the Pokey Death Finger. Further damage leads to a second split and an older man's head, which spews lasers while hiding parts of the screen. Survive this and one last division unveils a withered face, joined by frail attacks from a skeletal hand – you almost feel remorse as you shatter his face for the fourth and final time. Almost...

BEST BOSS



SUPER METROID SNES [Nintendo] 1994

■ FOR A company known for its outwardly family friendly appearance, Nintendo has a penchant for incorporating disturbing imagery into some of its most beloved properties. Mario suffocating underwater in his Nintendo 64 debut or Ganondorf's brutal execution in *The Legend Of Zelda: Wind Waker*. But when you're talking about true unflinching horror, then leave it to the *Metroid* franchise to uncover the dark heart throbbing beneath Nintendo's saccharine veneer. Enter Crocomire, a boss in *Super Metroid* that's notable for both the manner in which it is defeated and the terrifying nature of its demise. After Samus successfully powers Crocomire into a retreat, the beast falls into a river of molten lava, the flames burning the flesh from its bones as it howls in agony. Its cadaverous reappearance further cements the encounter as pure nightmare fuel and represents Nintendo at its most macabre.





SUPER MARIO WORLD 2: YOSHI'S ISLAND

SNES [Nintendo] 1995

■ Baby Bowser hasn't quite reached megalomaniac status when Yoshi stumbles into his playroom at the end of *Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's World*. This spoilt brat demands to ride the "green donkey" and throwing a right temper strop when Yoshi fails to oblige. It's after a few precision ground pounds from Mario's loyal steed that the infant is knocked on his rump bawling, only for Kamek to appear and cast a spell that transforms Prince Koopa into gigantic proportions. With the castle flattened, Bowser creeps towards Yoshi until he engulfs the entire screen, spitting fireballs and sending debris tumbling down to destroy the ground. Even as a child Bowser proved his nuisance value and an eternal rivalry was born.

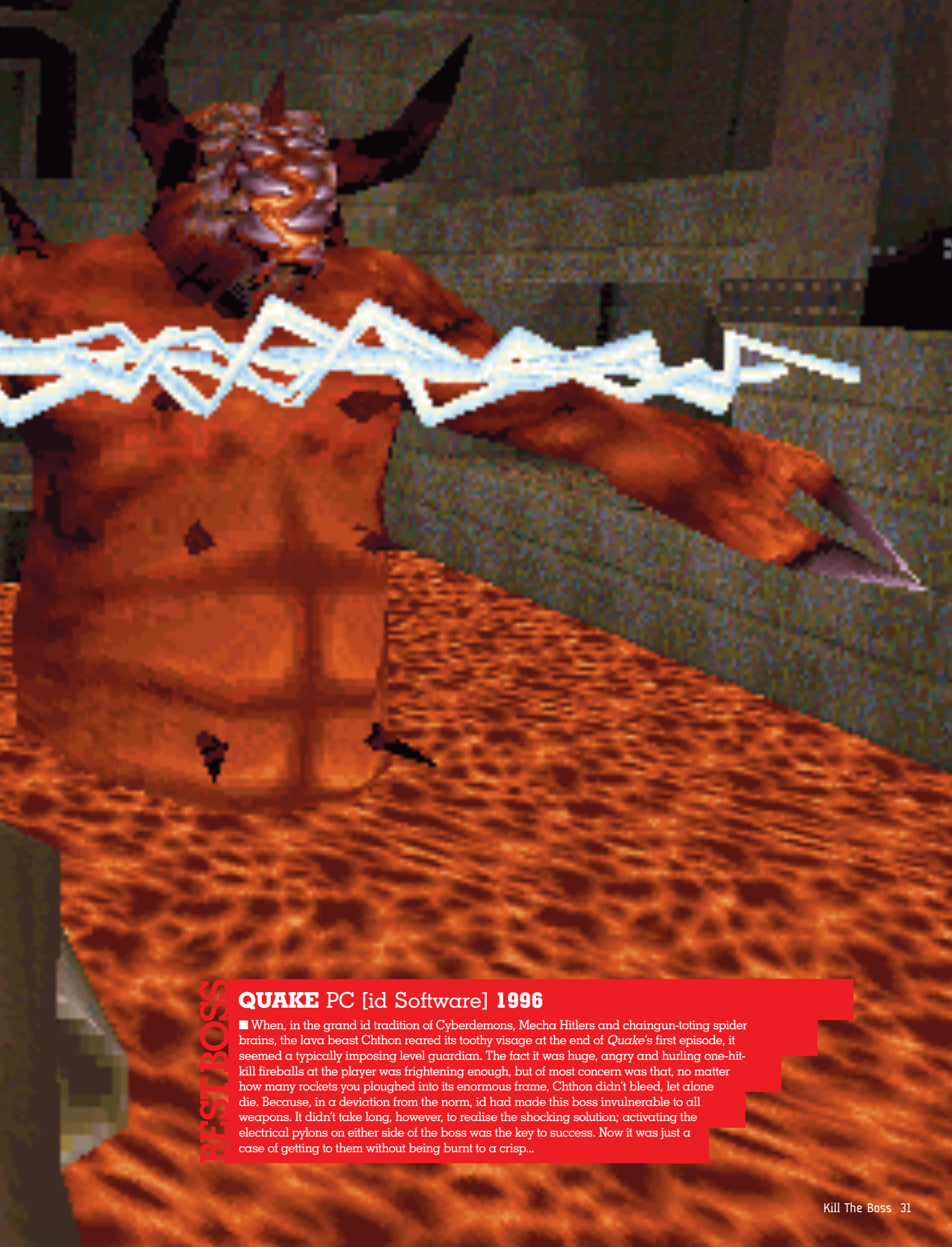


CHRONO TRIGGER [Square] 1995

■ RPG ENTHUSIASTS will likely remember *Chrono Trigger*'s final encounter with bitter fondness. Lavos' ruthlessness tested even the most battle-hardened heroes of time – a 65-billion-year hibernation beneath the Earth's surface helped the alien parasite develop some serious anger-management issues. Barrelling towards annihilation, humanity enlists Crono and the heroes of time for plenty of back-to-the-future antics, resulting in one of the most challenging (but ultimately rewarding) boss battles of the SNES era. The fight rages across three phases of increasing difficulty and while we may have stopped The Day Of Lavos from occurring, the haunting image of the Game Over screen will never abandon us.







BEST BOSS

QUAKE PC [id Software] 1996

■ When, in the grand id tradition of Cyberdemons, Mecha Hitlers and chaingun-toting spider brains, the lava beast Chthon reared its toothy visage at the end of *Quake's* first episode, it seemed a typically imposing level guardian. The fact it was huge, angry and hurling one-hit-kill fireballs at the player was frightening enough, but of most concern was that, no matter how many rockets you ploughed into its enormous frame, Chthon didn't bleed, let alone die. Because, in a deviation from the norm, id had made this boss invulnerable to all weapons. It didn't take long, however, to realise the shocking solution; activating the electrical pylons on either side of the boss was the key to success. Now it was just a case of getting to them without being burnt to a crisp...

SUPER MARIO RPG: LEGEND OF THE SEVEN STARS SNES [SQUARE] 1996

■ Let's address the glaring inaccuracy first: Bundt isn't even a Bundt cake. While we're at it, he also appears to be alive, has a face and can fire a series of razor-like snowflakes. But more importantly, Bundt personifies the tone of Square's brief dalliance in the *Mario* canon: an idiosyncratic creation rich in humour that bridges the Nintendo's licensed characters with Square's design sensibilities. The boss battle itself is rather elementary. You fight against a pair of French chef stereotypes who slowly begin to realise that the cake they're protecting is moving, running away when it springs to life. Then you fight the three-tiered wedding cake until all that's left is its base sponge. While it's not the most challenging or technical encounter, the unusual, charismatic nature of the boss battle and Bundt's unique design make it one of the most memorable in the history of Mario adversaries.







LYLAT WARS N64 [Nintendo] 1997

- Nintendo's sensational *Star Fox* sequel deserves to top many different 'best of' lists, but this month we'd like to pay special attention to its memorable final boss. Andross, or Uncle Andross to his friends, is like the classic *Sinistar* boss in that he likes to chew his enemies and spit them out, but he does so much more, too. The N64's advanced audio capabilities were used to give Andross a voice, which he used to taunt you for much of the final level. And the game's multiple routes actually revealed three different Andross forms depending on how you played. One revealed a robotic skull beneath the monkey skin and another saw you fight a giant brain connected to two floating eyeballs. Creepy.

CRASH BANDICOOT 2: CORTEX STRIKES BACK PLAYSTATION [Naughty Dog] 1997

■ BACK IN the PlayStation days, Naughty Dog was known for its imagination in level design and character creation. Never is this clearer than in *Crash 2*'s first boss battle – where you go toe-to-toe with the genetically-enhanced kangaroo/dog arsonist Ripper Roo; having to avoid his TNT and Nitro traps to strike when he's tired. Roo's story is actually quite a sad one – in the credits to the original *Crash Bandicoot*, it's revealed that Roo received therapy and spent eight years in higher education before writing his book *Through the Eyes of the Vortex: A Study of Rapid Evolution And Its Consequences*. This explains his gentlemanly appearance in *Cortex Strikes Back*, but alas, once you beat him in this boss battle, you send Roo right back into the throes of insanity.



GOLDENEYE 007 **Nintendo 64 [Rare] 1997**

■ SEAN BEAN couldn't have been massively impressed that his likeness was used to create a character that appeared to have Annie Lennox's face wrapped around a pineapple, but nevertheless his villainous Alec Trevelyan is one of the highlights of Rare's seminal N64 shooter. Trevelyan has almost a Jaws-like presence throughout *GoldenEye's* exceptionally eclectic campaign, the evasive one-time 00-agent emerging for air on several occasions to goad Bond before disappearing once again into the ether. He's a suitably frustrating antagonistic figure, mirroring Bond's uncanny invulnerability to bullets, oversized arsenal and supercilious swagger right until the very end when the nippy bastard is chucked from the top of a colossal satellite. For England? No. This one's for us.





CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
PlayStation [Konami] 1997

THOUGH DRACULA is a recurring villain throughout the *Castlevania* series, he has never been better used than in 1997's *Symphony Of The Night*. This genre-bending masterpiece defied convention from the very start by actually beginning the game at the end of the previous one. It put you in control of Richter Belmont, the hero of 1993's *Rondo Of Blood*, and forced you to face the dark lord and, ultimately, lose before the story kicked in for real. As well as tying in brilliantly with another classic *Castlevania*, this bold beginning also ensured that you dreaded the final encounter with Dracula, knowing all along just what he was capable of from the start.

BEST BOSS

SUPER SMASH BROS. NINTENDO 64 [Nitendo] 1999

■ Mario, Link, Kirby and Samus thrown into the arena to duke it out over... what exactly? Don't look for reason or rhyme in the curious concept of Sakurai's *Smash Bros.* series, because it's simply not there. To epitomise all the unrelenting nonsense, HAL Labs saw fit to add an ominous giant glove as the final enemy, who drifts into the arena at the conclusion of the arcade trial. The most interesting aspect of the Master Hand's appearance is how it subverts the rules of *Smash Bros.* up to that point, tasking the player to gradually chip away its HP as it unleashes a volley of screen-consuming attacks – each derived from various villains from Nintendo's heritage. But, let's be honest, it's rather anticlimactic after surviving the gamut of legendary fighters up until that point. But it's the very fact that it's such a bizarre inclusion is the very reason why it remains so memorable. We don't know why you exist, Master Hand, but we're sure glad you do.



16%



1P
▼



POKÉMON: GOLD/SILVER GAME BOY COLOR [Nintendo] 2000

■ DECEPTIVELY DEEP and ludicrously full of hidden goodies and optional extras, the *Pokémon* franchise is one that rewards persistence and exploration more than almost any other. But among the finest and most exciting secrets in the series' history is this particular encounter – a secluded showdown with 'Red' (AKA Ash Ketchum), the hero of the original games and the most powerful trainer in the land by no small margin. His high-level team is no pushover (with the exception of Pikachu, who is far less useful than the lying cartoon makes him out to be – time to man up and use that Thunderstone, Red), but with a healthy spread of moves and a lot of training, ardent trainers will eventually conquer this ultimate *Pokémon* challenge.





GODZILLA
:L96

HP:



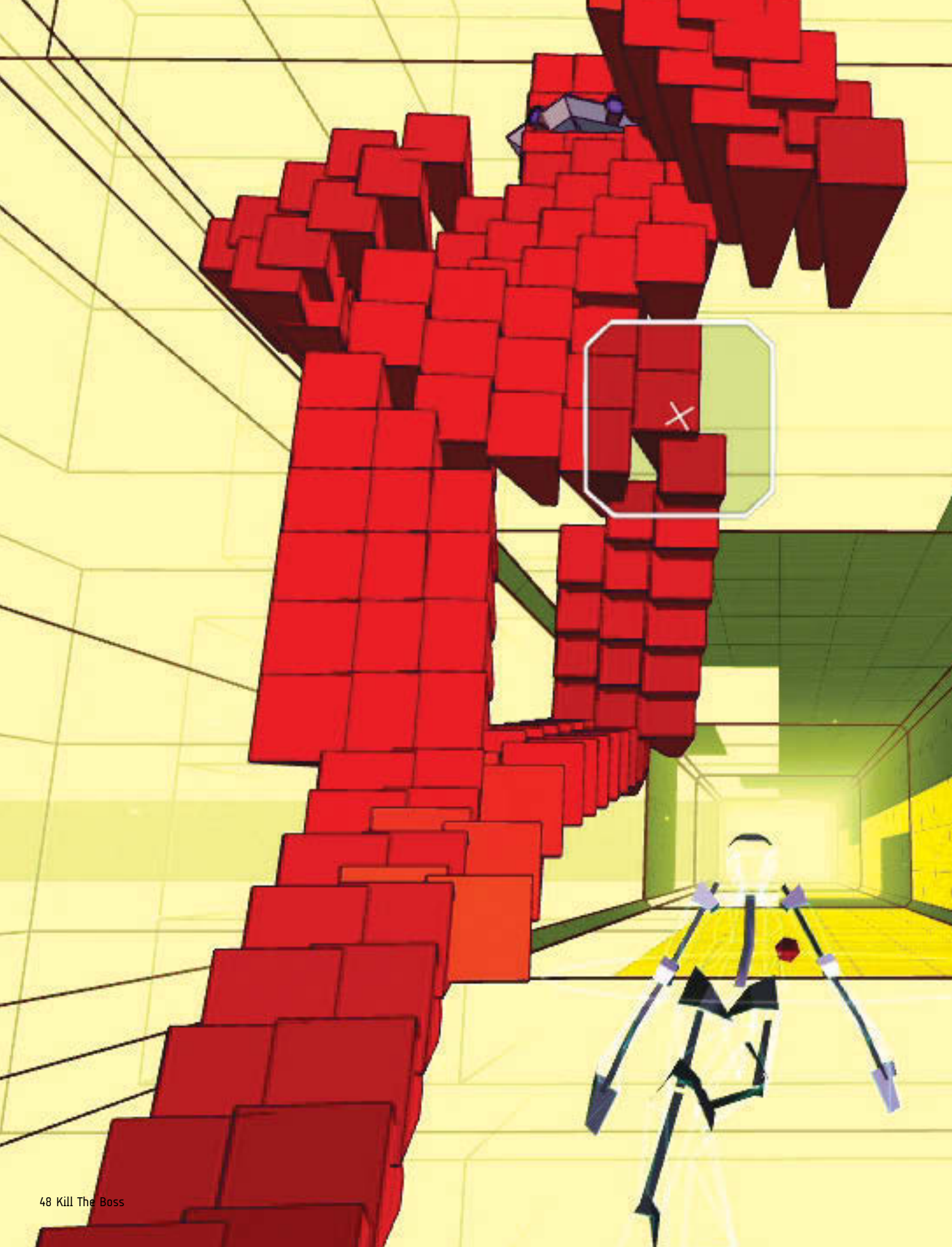
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CONKER'S BAD FUR DAY NINTENDO 64 [Rare] 2001

■ IN PREVIOUS issues we've reflected on noteworthy bosses by observing how tough, obtuse, fiendish and even bastardly each has appeared on screen. Yet none has managed to kick up a stink quite like *Conker's Bad Fur Day's* sweet corn-munching, opera-singing malevolence, who is, quite literally, a massive shit. Residing in the foul depths of Poo Mountain, The Great Mighty Poo is a slippery presence, slithering around our furry protagonist and slinging faecal matter at the pesky rodent in between bellowing a self-titled scornful tune. Challenge for the most part is absent, meaning you'll wipe up this brown menace with toilet paper within a few minutes, but his jovial front and soprano shriek amalgamate into a creature unlike anything we've come across before or since.



BEAT MIGHTY POO



REZ**PLAYSTATION 2 [UNITED ARTIST GAMES] 2001**

■ SOUND DESIGN has never been more intrinsic to a gameplay conceit than in Tetsuya Mizuguchi's esoteric rail shooter *Rez*. The combination of punchy synth riffs and sturdy percussion beats accompanying each player interaction reinforces an already invigorating electronic soundtrack, creating a congruent blend of urgency and tension that feeds directly the title's most pulse-pounding sequences. The exhilarating backing track present towards the end of level 4 immediately indicates a heady challenge ahead: a boss that takes on a humanoid form and starts hurtling through a series of twisting corridors as you attempt to blast every last pixel from its being. Triumphant over this marathon enemy requires both the utmost dexterity and lightning-fast reflexes and doing it is not only utterly rewarding but will amplify your admiration of Mizuguchi's wondrous technical achievement.



TIME 100

1978 1981 1984 1987 1990 1993 1996 1999 2002 2005 2008 2011 2014 2017 2020 2023



IKARUGA DREAMCAST [Treasure] 2002

■ Renowned as they are for having some of the most ridiculous bosses imaginable, shoot-'em-ups have to work pretty hard to impress in this department. And *Ikaruga*, like so many other great Treasure games, did just that. While simple in design, each of its bosses demonstrated an exquisite understanding of using the game's system, both for and against the player, intimidating with a seemingly unavoidable tidal wave of two-tone bullets. But this circular foe is perhaps our favourite, black-and-white death-cookies coming at you from literally all angles while you try to take out each of the turrets, but there's a nasty surprise waiting for you when all of one colour falls...

BEST BOSS



STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC PC/Xbox [BioWare] 2003

■ PLENTY OF *Star Wars* games have sought to emulate the trials of becoming a Jedi Knight but no title has quite encapsulated the imaginative spirit of that journey in a tangible manner nor the intricacies of its expanded universe quite like BioWare. Darth Malak himself is a villain worthy of the lore, driven by an arrogance that ultimately leads to his own destruction, and the final confrontation wherein the Sith is confronted by his one-time master is an unforgettable moment bristling with an intimate intensity. The battle itself is equally as tense with Malak drawing power from captive Jedi trapped around the room, forcing the player to free each prisoner before Malak can be taken out. Regretful of his deeds, Darth Malak dies as one of the *Star Wars* saga's most overlooked icons. "In the end, I am nothing."



BESTBOSS

GOD OF WAR

PlayStation 2
[Sony] 2005

■ VERY FEW games achieve so much in such a short space of time. Within minutes of angry god-botherer Kratos entering the scene, players witness the Hydra – an awe-inspiring beast of ancient myth with the capacity to dwarf even the perpetually miffed Spartan standing starboard bow – emerging from the depths of the sea. It sets the tone for much of the ensuing game: an incomparable scale, wanton destruction and a predilection for absurd bloodshed. Despite the brutality that the series is now synonymous with, the detail paid to the flowing combat mechanics and environmental strategy elevated the design beyond its hack-'n'-slash genre brethren – an aspect of the franchise that rarely receives its due attention. But who really cares about the details when you're shoving a pointy stick through a monster's eye?





SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

PS2 [Team Ico] 2006

■ RIGHTLY VENERATED for its gargantuan cast of bosses, *Shadow Of The Colossus* is an experience of unparalleled epic proportions. The Phalanx battle is arguably its most memorable moment, taking place in a desolate desert plane with the skeletal creature bursting through the sand and soaring gracefully into the sky. What ensues is a breathtaking pursuit on horseback, with Wander puncturing the underside of the beast with arrows until it drops low enough to scale. Without disconnecting control, the player mounts the colossus, searching for weak points on its spine before landing the final blow. However, it's a victory tinged with remorse – without any provocation or hostile gestures, another incredible creature of the Forbidden Land is dead. We're sorry, big guy.



